# SARON MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

**Saron's Mission:** ***Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!!***

Reverend James E. Smith, Pastor
Cell: 269-816-3870
Email: pastorjames@saronlutheran.org

Amanda Bradley, Communications Director
Cell: 419-306-5780
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
bradley717@gmail.com

Marcus Roll, Music Director
Email: roll.marcus17@gmail.com

Beth Gray, Organist/Pianist
Email: egrayroll@gmail.com

Ken Boyd, Bookkeeper
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org

Mackenzie Dressander, Nursery Director
Email: mackenzie.trail99@gmail.com

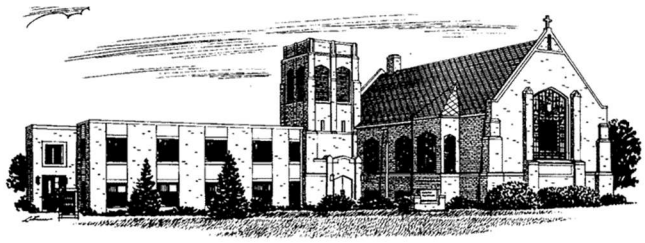
**Typical Sunday at Saron:**

Fall, Winter and Spring **(through May 17, 2026):**
8:30am Worship On-Location
9:40am-10:30am Adult Bible Study
10am-10:45am Learning Hour for Ages 3-8th Grade
11am Worship with Zoom Option
Nursery Available

Summer Schedule (**begins May 25, 2026**):
10am Worship
On-Location and via Zoom
Nursery Available
No Learning Hour

*We hold in prayer:*
*The Rev. Yehiel Curry,*
*Presiding Bishop, ELCA*
*The Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Bishop of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA*
*The Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes*

*Our Companion Synods:*
*Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras*
*Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea*
*Lutheran Church of Latvia*



## What are you doing on New Year's Eve?

There's an old Christian tradition called *Watchnight* in which Christians gather for prayer and song to ring in the New Year. After the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation, which was slated to go into effect on Jan. 1, 1863, Watchnight has since become a particularly powerful and cherished tradition in the American Black church. While Saron is not having a New Year's Eve or Watchnight service this year, the Revised Common Lectionary has readings appointed for the day, culminating with Matthew 25:31-46.

This is the famous passage of the exalted Son of Man separating the sheep (good!) from the goats (not good!). The separation is based on how individuals have treated the least privileged and most vulnerable in their midst.

To the sheep, Jesus says, he was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, in prison, and they came to his aid. And to the goats, the opposite. What both groups share is they had no idea Jesus was present either time. It's like Jesus is *undercover.* "When was it Lord" that we saw you like this? "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me (Mt 25:40).'"

That is a strange reading to close out the year, isn't it!?

Or perhaps it's not so strange. Maybe, like me, you mentally do sort of a year-end-review: What were my accomplishments this year? My setbacks and disappointments? What will I take away from this year? What do I hope to accomplish for next year?

Those are good questions—I still plan to ask them! But maybe you noticed who the chief protagonist is: me, myself, and I, i.e. the less-than-holy trinity.

Our faith can teach us to ask still better questions. So maybe as we head toward New Year's Eve, or "Watchnight" 2025, we could ask: "Jesus, when was it we saw you this year?" Who did we have an opportunity to help and, just as importantly!, who did we meet undercover Jesus in? When were our horizons of the holy expanded? And as we head into 2026, let's watch to see Jesus when he shows up in our neighbors.

Happy New Year!
Pr. James E. Smith

# General Information

**OFFICE HOURS**

Pastor James E. Smith
Monday – Thursday
Hours may vary. Appointments are great!
Amanda Bradley (Admin Assistant):
Mondays & Thursdays 10am-2pm
Ken Boyd (Bookkeeper):
Thursday Mornings and by Appointment
Helping Hands Office Volunteers:
Wednesdays 9:00am-11am (approx)

**If you or your loved one is need of a visit or pastoral care, please contact Pastor James at 269-816-3870.**

**Specific questions or concerns may be directed to an appropriate council member or committee liaison:**
President – Fran Bolson
Vice President – Erik Bergh
Secretary – Claudia Staude
Treasurer – Ed Brunner
Worship – Marilyn Frey
Learning – Fran Bolson or Scott Gaspari
Outreach – Jim Manore
Facilities – Steve Cook or Ed Brunner
Youth – Chuck Knebl
Support – Jim Manore or Ed Brunner
Hospitality – Merrily Smith or Claudia Staude

# Caring and Sharing

**Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members!**

1/3 Kealana Gulley
1/13 Timothy Smith
1/15 Colin Ashley
1/15 Walter Schmuhl
1/16 Jonah Rood
1/18 Hayley Knapp
1/19 Claire Carter
1/19 Willow Davis
1/23 Don Hafer
1/25 Karen Johnson
1/27 Kathi Anserello
1/28 Rev Wayne Shearier
1/28 John Taylor
1/29 Ken Boyd

**Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members!**

1/1 Linda & Charles Pater
1/2 James & Jennifer Nicholas
1/19 Steven & Denise Cook

If there are any omissions from the birthday or anniversary list, or if a date is incorrect, please let us know so we can get it correct in the future!

**CONGRATULATIONS**

Saron was excited to welcome **Timothy Smith** to the Lord's table on December 25, 2025 as he was served his first Holy Communion. Timothy is the son of Pastor James & Pastor Nicole Smith. Congratulations, Timothy!

Mark your calendar for

**Sunday, January 25, 2026**!

We will join together at **12:15pm for a Pot Luck** in the Fellowship Hall then move back to the sanctuary at **1pm** to hear council and committee reports, approve the 2026 spending plan, elect new council members, and more! All voting members are encouraged to attend on-location or via Zoom. Guests are welcome to listen.

# Worship

## ASSISTED HEARING DEVICES

Our sound system in the sanctuary came with headphones to assist those having difficulty hearing the worship service. If you are interested, ask Marcus if you can try one out.

## SENSORY BAGS

As part of extending an unconditional welcome to all, we have Sensory Bags available for use. These bags contain a variety of fidgets that can help someone feel more able to sit quietly and/or focus. We also have noise canceling headphones for those who are sound sensitive. These brightly colored bags can be found in the narthex.

## PRAYER GROUP

You are invited to offer your concerns or thanksgivings via our attendance cards each Sunday. Requests can also be made online via a link in our Thursday email. You may include as much, or little, detail as you wish. Requests are then given to the Monday prayer group. **You are invited to be part of this Monday group at 11am.** We follow a simple format of morning prayer and insert the petitions and prayers for Saron's ministry and the world. Most weeks we are done in 30 minutes.

## ALTAR FLOWERS

Sponsor a week by using the link in the weekly email or by contacting the church office. Please note any occasion/thanksgiving to be recognized in the bulletin. **Flowers are now $40 per vase.** Checks are payable to Saron with "Flowers" as the memo. Take them home to enjoy then please **return the vase.**

Nursery service is available during worship for children under five years old (exceptions are made, especially for siblings). There is a live-feed monitor in the nursery where you may keep up with the service if you need to stay with your child. For children five and older, there are options to bring into the sanctuary, such as clipboards with coloring pages, sensory bags (see article above) and children's bulletins. If you need to step out with them to regroup, there are quiet activities in a bin next to the sofa in the narthex. We embrace family units in all stages and welcome wiggles & giggles as a part of worship.

We recognize the worship experience for families may not look the same for all and encourage sharing concerns and suggestions with Mackenzie Dressander (269/944-7753). Please also contact her if you are willing to volunteer to support this important service.

## SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

**January 4: 2nd Sunday of Christmas**
Jeremiah 31:7-14
Psalm 147:12-20
Ephesians 1:3-14
John 1: 10-18

**January 11: Baptism of Our Lord**
Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 29
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17

**January 18: 2nd Sunday after Epiphany**
Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 40:1-11
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42

**January 25: 3rd Sunday after Epiphany**
Isaiah 9:1-4
Psalm 27:1, 4-9
1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23

Youth Group (middle school & high school age) is still trying to work out a schedule for meetings that will work for our busy students/athletes/artists.

**Contact Chuck Knebl at chasknebl@comcast.net with any questions or to be added to the email list.**

# Learning

## SUNDAY LEARNING HOUR

The Learning Hour offers the following options:

- 9:40am-10:30am Adult Forum: High School - Adult
- 10am-10:45am Confirmation: Grades 6-8
- 10am-10:45am Sunday School: Preschool - Grade 5
    - New Classroom!
    - New Curriculum!
    - New Friends!

**WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY**

**Acts of Faith:** Tongues of fire, a *Treasure Island*-style sea voyage, Paul's preaching literally boring a man to death: the book of Acts is a feast of the works of the Holy Spirit! Join our Wednesday morning Bible study as we continue to explore this "act"ion-packed book, every Wednesday in January at 9:30am in the upstairs lounge. No special materials needed. Come when you can! Contact Pastor James with questions.

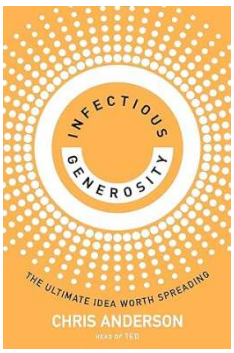
**TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY**

This group will pick up again on **January 13**. We will focus on the lessons of the week until Lent. Join us when you can on Tuesday evenings at 6pm in the upstairs lounge. We meet for one hour of discussion, then adjourn to a local restaurant for food and fellowship. All are welcome!

If you have any questions, feel free to call, text, or email:
Don Hafer (269/985-3637, haferdon@gmail.com)
Ed Staude (636/288-1016, staude.edmund@gmail.com)
Eric Standen (269/759-3556, dande-standen@sbcglobal.net)
Pr. James (269/816-3870, pastorjames@saronlutheran.org)

# BOOK CLUB

We are taking off the month of January, continuing again on **February 1 at 6:30pm in the upstairs lounge with *Infectious Generosity: The Ultimate Idea Worth Spreading* by Chris Anderson.** From Amazon: *From the bestselling author, media pioneer, and curator of TED, an inspiring book about one of humankind's defining but overlooked impulses, and how we can super-charge its potential to build a hopeful future.*




Everyone is welcome at any or all of our meetings. Questions? **Contact Kathy Cowall at 269-428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com.**

*You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them.*
- Ray Bradbury

# FORUM & fellowship

Mark your calendars for two very interesting and very different topics in January. We've all heard the term *Christian Nationalism* bandied about, but what exactly is it, and is it a good thing or is it dangerous movement? The Reverend Jeffery Hubers will join us in the upstairs lounge on **January 11 at 6:30pm** to walk us through this very prescient topic. Reverend Hubers is pastor at First Congregational here in St. Joe and the current president of the Interfaith Action Committee. You won't want to miss this one.

Then on **January 25** we shift gears and learn a little bit of local history. What is the basis of the competition between the cities of Benton Harbor and St. Joseph? How far back does it go? Our guest speaker will be Chuck Jager, the executive director of the Morton House in Benton Harbor and retired secondary history instructor.

Come and join us for a couple of very educational evenings. Bring a friend, everyone is always welcome! **Contact Ed Staude at 636/288-1016 with any questions.**

# Women of the ELCA

**INSTALLATION**

On Sunday, January 18, the following Saron Church Women Officers and Leaders will be installed.

President: Melanie McCammon
Vice President: Linda Pater
Secretary: Mary Kynast
Treasurer: Denise Cook
Mission Action Chair: Colleen Lundgren

**DEBORAH CIRCLE**

Deborah Circle Christmas dinner will be held at the home of Linda Pater on **January 14 at 6pm**. A carpool will leave the church at **5:30pm** for those who wish to join it. Everyone should bring a dish to share (not dessert) and also a monetary gift for the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen.

**Contact Melanie at 269/449-8399 with any questions.**

**UPDATE ON BAKE SALE & MENTOR FAMILY FUND**

Saron Church Women thanks everyone who participated in the bake sale on December 14. Proceeds from that day came to $609.10. Continued donations on December 21 totaled an additional $59. The grand total of **$668.10** will be given to the Saron Mentor Family Fund which is used to help people with utility bills, medical concerns, food for holidays, Christmas gifts and miscellaneous needs. If you ever know of anyone who may need a little "boost up," please contact **Linda Pater at 269/369-1178.** Thanks, again, for all your generous support. NOTE: **Contributions to this fund are always welcome at any time of year with checks written to Saron Church Women.**

# Hospitality

**SUNDAY SNACKS**

Who doesn't love a snack during a time of fellowship after the service? If you would like to be a Sunday snack host, sign up via the link in our weekly email or call/email the office so Amanda can sign you up. Please plan for at least 30 to partake. Thank you!

# Outreach

**NOISY OFFERING**

We receive a noisy offering (and those not-so-noisy bills) on the first Sunday of each month.
These gifts are sent to ELCA World Hunger.

Saron is consistently ranked as a top 10 contributor to this effort. Thank you for your continued support!

THE BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN™
HEART-TO-HEART™

*Simple food, honestly sourced and lovingly made creates connections, gives fuel to the fight, and starves ignorance and apathy.*
-Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen

On November 27, the Thanksgiving meal was provided to the Soup Kitchen by Grand Mere Inn. Individual pies were donated by Keith Stevens in memory of his late wife Jan, who was the coordinator of Saron's meal at the Soup Kitchen for many years. Thank you, Keith!

We are looking forward to preparing bag lunches at Red Lotus Nutrition for the Soup Kitchen again on January 22 as we await word that the extensive renovations on the new Soup Kitchen (former Lark's BBQ on Main Street) are finally complete. If you are able to help with the preparation or provide cookies, please use the link in the weekly email or contact **Kathie Bradley at 269-921-4665**.

Thank you to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, and prayers.
*Joyfully sharing God's love for all!*

**ELCA GOOD GIFTS**

We've had a great response to the 2025 Advent Good Gifts campaign so far with 15 goats, 8 piglets, 12 hives of honeybees, and 9 broods of chicks sponsored! There is still time until after epiphany to participate. Simply fill out the form next to the Good Gifts Christmas tree in the narthex. You can also contact the office. Contact Jim Manore with any questions at 269/861-5814. **Please make checks payable to Saron Lutheran Church with "ELCA Good Gifts" as the memo.**

**EYE GLASS COLLECTION**

Do you have old glasses sitting in a drawer? Lions Club has provided a collection box in the narthex. We have several members who are Lions that can deliver our glasses to the club where they will do more good. Thank you!

**INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE**

The Inclusivity Task Force is committed to extending a welcome to all. Our congregation adopted the following welcome statement and is a **Reconciling in Christ** church.

**As a community of faith who *joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. We are committed to the work of racial equity. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome.**

If you ever have any questions on our inclusivity journey, please feel free to call any one of the task force members:

**Lindsay Gaspari:847/373-8826 lindsay.gaspari@yahoo.com**
**Meredith Gacek:269/235-4530 meredithgacek@yahoo.com**

Interfaith Action

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity.

**Contact Pastor James or Merrily Smith at merrilyannsmith@gmail.com for more information on this group.**

# Support

The Support Committee typically meets the Tuesday before the third Monday of the month at 8pm via Zoom. Contact Don Hafer with any questions at 269/985-3637.

**STOCK DONATIONS**

Saron partners with a brokerage firm to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Ed Brunner at ebrunner54@gmail.com to receive more information. Thanks!

# Facilities

**HELPING HANDS**

We do all sorts of things from building maintenance to preps for worship in the sanctuary to assembling bulletins and newsletters and so much more. We meet on Wednesdays around 9am and know you are invited – whatever your age, gender, or ability. There is a job for you to use your helping hands!

# Miscellaneous Bits of News

Saron Lutheran Church
1875 | 150th Anniversary | 2025

- **PRAYER & MEDITATION GARDEN**
  - Future plans for the space relocating the Japanese maple to a new spot in the ground (the current above ground planter is rotting), elemental sculptures, additional landscaping and signage to encourage the community to enjoy the space and reinforce our welcome to all.
  - **The extent of our work on the Community Prayer & Meditation Garden is directly tied to the funds we collect. If you would like to contribute, make sure your donation is marked "Prayer Garden."**

**We wrap up our year of making new memories while commemorating our past with our last event:**

## January 11, 2026

Almost exactly 1 year after our kick-off event, we will have a finale to end our celebratory year. There will be a brief wrap-up during worship (11am), the bells will play (11am) and Bishop Julie Schneider-Thomas will be here to preach (both services). In the narthex, we'll have posters with pictures and snacks, of course, because that's just how we roll!

# JANUARY 2026

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | **1** | **2** | **3** |
| **4** **2nd Sunday of Christmas**<br>8:30am Worship<br>9:40am Adult Learning Hour<br>10am Youth Learning Hour<br>11am Worship with Zoom Option | **5**<br>11am Prayer Group | **6**<br>**Epiphany!** | **7**<br>9am Helping Hands<br>9:30am Bible Study | **8**<br>6pm Bells Rehearsal<br>7pm Choir Rehearsal | **9** | **10** |
| **11** **150th Anniversary Finale**<br>8:30am Worship with Bishop Julie<br>9:40am Adult Learning Hour<br>10am Youth Learning Hour<br>11am Worship with Bishop Julie with Zoom Option | **12**<br>11am Prayer Group<br>6pm Budget Meeting | **13**<br>6pm Bible Study<br>8pm Support Meeting | **14**<br>9am Helping Hands<br>9:30am Bible Study | **15**<br>6pm Bells Rehearsal<br>7pm Choir Rehearsal | **16** | **17** |
| **18**<br>8:30am Worship<br>9:40am Adult Learning Hour<br>10am Youth Learning Hour<br>11am Worship with Zoom Option | **19**<br>11am Prayer Group<br>6pm Council Meeting<br>**Newsletter Articles Due** | **20**<br>6pm Bible Study | **21**<br>9am Helping Hands<br>9:30am Bible Study | **22**<br>6pm Bells Rehearsal<br>7pm Choir Rehearsal<br>**Soup Kitchen** | **23** | **24** |
| **25**<br>8:30am Worship<br>9:40am Adult Learning Hour<br>10am Youth Learning Hour<br>11am Worship with Zoom Option<br>**12:15pm Pot Luck**<br>**1pm Annual Meeting** | **26**<br>11am Prayer Group | **27**<br>6pm Bible Study | **28**<br>9am Helping Hands<br>9:30am Bible Study | **29**<br>6pm Bells Rehearsal<br>7pm Choir Rehearsal | **30** | **31** |

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
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A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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